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ABSTRACT

In 1998, the Network expanded its project in Connecticut to a series of 10-day workshop. The Network brought together representative 12-member teams from eight Title I elementary schools to learn about successful research-based reform models and best practices. The teams designed a 3-year Reform Blueprint with goals and objectives, including strategies and timetable to guide implementation activities. The Blueprint was organized around the eight components of the comprehensive school reform that are common to high-performing elementary schools: (1) school-site governance by principal and management council; (2) challenging academic standards in reading, math, and writing; (3) student assessment and adult accountability; (4) school-wide character education; (5) site-based professional development; (6) integrated school support services; (7) instructional technology support; and (8) parent and community engagement. These components were identified as the essential ingredients of changing schools from centers of teaching to centers of learning. No one model could encompass everything that was found in this evaluation. Summaries of the evaluation findings are grouped by three prevailing themes: initiating and maintaining change; dominance of one change strategy; and obstacles to change. (DFR)

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TERREL H. BELL SCHOOL REFORM NETWORK

FIRST-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTIONS	PAGE
Executive Summary	i
Introduction of the Bell School Reform Network	1
Methodology	
Focus and Model	2
Sample	2
Information	3
Analyses of Information	4
Findings	
Major themes with related emerging issues in implementing the eight components of comprehensive school reform	
School-site Management	5
Challenging Academic Standards	6
Student Assessment and Adult Accountability	7
School-wide Character Education Program	8
Professional and Staff Development	9
Integrated School Support Services	10
Technology Planning and Training	11
Parent and Community Engagement	12
Other themes and issues	
Implementing and Using the Blueprint	13
Technical and Financial Resources	14
Recommendations to Schools on Implementing the Eight Components	16
Summary Comments on Implementing Blueprints	17
References	18
Endnotes	18
Appendices	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The *Terrel H. Bell School Reform Network* is a private, non-profit, educational research and development organization. In 1997 the *Bell Network* piloted its Comprehensive School Reform Project with one-day introductory workshops in Connecticut, California and Maryland. In Connecticut, 22 superintendents and 10 principals participated in the Project, which was co-sponsored by two regional technical assistance centers—Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) and LEARN. The *Network's* workshop curriculum was developed from its nationally-acclaimed study, *RECLAIMING OUR NATION AT RISK—Lessons Learned: Reforming our Public Schools*, authored by the late Dr. Terrel H. Bell, former U.S. Secretary of Education, the late Dr. Kent Lloyd, Bell's Deputy Undersecretary, and by Dr. Diane Ramsey, Chair of Bell Network.

In 1998 the *Network* expanded its Project in Connecticut to a series of 10-day workshops. Using a community engagement strategy for comprehensive reform, the *Network* brought together representative 12-member teams from eight Title I elementary schools—the principal, teachers, parents, board member, businessperson—to learn about successful research-based reform models and best practices. Each team assessed its own school against high-performance schools, and identified its strengths and weaknesses. The teams designed a three-year Reform Blueprint with goals and objectives, including strategies and timetable to guide implementation activities. The Blueprint was organized around the eight components of comprehensive school reform that are common to high-performing elementary schools: (1) school-site governance by principal and management council; (2) challenging academic standards in reading, math, and writing; (3) student assessment and adult accountability; (4) school-wide character education; (5) site-based professional development; (6) integrated school support services; (7) instructional technology support; and (8) parent and community engagement.

Our first-year evaluation focused on the extent to which the eight elementary schools in the Network's Consortium I implemented their Blueprints during the 1999 – 2000 academic year. We used a multiple-methods evaluation model to converge information from surveys, interviews, evaluation reports and other documents. In evaluating the schools' attempts to implement their Reform Blueprints, we addressed themes with related emerging issues.

MAJOR THEMES WITH RELATED EMERGING ISSUES IN THE EIGHT COMPONENTS OF COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM

1. *Site-based Management*

The site-based management team at each school is invested with the authority to guide implementation of implement the school's Blueprint and to manage change. Typically, the team—principal (chair), teachers, parents and community members—monitors student assessment, curriculum and programs, and makes decisions to improve curriculum and programs. In addition, the team is informed of the Success for All (SFA) program activities, such as family involvement in student learning.

Three themes of site-based management were assessed. First, on the issue of ***unified focus***, over three-fourths of the respondents agreed that their school staff and administrators collectively focus on improved teaching and learning. The majority of these respondents cited professional development as the focal point for improving teaching and learning. Also, it was cited that the SFA curriculum provided a common language which helped focus on teaching and learning. Second, on ***innovative management strategies***, data showed a low level of agreement. Some respondents thought school management was quality oriented but dominated by district directives. Although some said they were not aware of innovative strategies, a minority of respondents described the SFA approach as unique in management approaches. Three, ***engagement of parents and community*** showed low level of agreement on their involvement in site-based management. Responses suggested that in spite of their active involvement in decision making, they only represented a small number of parents and the community members.

2. *Challenging Academic Standards: Reading, Mathematics, and Writing*

Effective curriculum and instruction flow from best-practice research and are guided by standards that address both learning and performance. The standards should embody disciplines beyond reading, writing, and mathematics. And, instruction must include innovative teaching and learning strategies for a broad range of student abilities.

Three themes of standards were assessed. First, on ***research-based curriculum***, the majority of respondents thought their instructional programs were researched based. The SFA reading curriculum was cited as research based and well-tested in many schools throughout the United States. Second, on ***presence of standards***, half the schools were in high agreement that their instruction was guided by standards, citing the CMT objectives and the Connecticut Curriculum Frameworks as major sources for curriculum standards, with SFA and selected math programs as supporting sources. The schools with lower agreement about standards acknowledged SFA and their new math programs as providing current standards while other standards were being developed. Third, on ***innovative strategies***, the majority of schools felt strategies were being employed in teaching and learning for all students. Only two schools stated that their strategies for special education student could improve.

3. *Student Assessment and Adult Accountability*

Student assessment starts with an expected set of performance standards. Student outcomes can be measured in several ways depending on the type of assessment. The two most widely used outcome assessments were the percentages of students (1) scoring in the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) goal areas, and (2) reading at grade level or beyond in the SFA curriculum. Schools were mixed on whether or not they had effective strategies for improving achievements of under-performing students. Respondents suggested the availability of many strategies, such as before- and after-school programs and tutoring, but some stated the relative effectiveness of the programs was unknown.

4. *School-wide Character Education Program*

Character education is a critical component in changing the school's learning environment. The majority of schools had implemented character education programs prior to fall 1999. Most schools built on their existing programs by using the SFA character education component, while a few dropped their original programs and exclusively adopted the SFA component.

5. *Professional and Staff Development*

Professional and staff development contributes to the effectiveness and vitality of the learning environment—a point that comprehensive school reform emphasizes. However, less than one-quarter of the schools agreed that their professional development plan was based on students' academic strengths and weaknesses and was built upon relevant previous efforts.

6. *Integrated School Support Services*

This component is defined as the combination of services used to address the needs of the students and families within the school. These services can include health, psychological, emotional, as well as transportation, nutrition and administrative. The school needs to assess its range of support services and integrate them whenever possible. This will maximize available financial and human resources in order to improve student achievement. The resources evaluated were staff participation and tutoring. For example, most schools agreed that staff was involved in implementing school reform. All SFA reports cited strong tutoring teams within the schools.

7. *Technology Planning and Training*

Technology is defined as low to high forms of equipment that support the teaching and learning process. This reform component stresses the importance of choosing the right form of technology to enhance the lesson and vary the teaching techniques. The findings suggest that technology was the most misinterpreted of all reform components because of misunderstanding what is meant by technology. Most likely the low scores in this area reflect the prevalent notion that technology means the use and training regarding computers and not other forms of equipment.

8. *Parent and Community Engagement*

Parent involvement is not exclusive in that it cuts across many other reform components, such as governance, character education, and integrative services. Parent involvement was evaluated by participation in decision-making, support for learning, and communication. Most schools view parents as being involved in decision-making committees. But, only about half of the schools reported that parents were being provided with information that they understand. None of the schools strongly agreed that parents were providing support for at-home learning activities.

OTHER THEMES AND ISSUES

1. *Implementing and Using the Blueprint*

Implementing a Blueprint for change involves an agreed-upon focus on the eight components of comprehensive reform. It is preceded by a thorough needs assessment. Only half the schools felt that a thorough needs assessment had been conducted. Most schools had high agreement about improvement. Those with lesser agreement about school improvement stated that the SFA program had dominated the focus. Schools had mixed responses about whether or not improvements encompassed the entire school and were aligned with standards, curriculum, instruction, and professional development. On-going evaluation of component activities is essential for improving schools. Yet many respondents discussed the evaluation activities related to SFA assessments and CMT assessments.

2. *Technical and Financial Resources*

School reform requires human and financial support, such as technical assistance, facilities, and funding. For technical assistance, the majority of schools felt that it was not linked to program needs or to state and local standards. Respondents expressed the need for more professional development and tutors, but cited SFA as providing much assistance with the reading curriculum. For facilities and funding, the most schools felt that resource coordination needed improvement, and districts could do better leveraging existing resources. Some schools did cite Bell Network and other organizations as actively helping them obtain funding. Title 1 grants supported the majority of reform efforts.

SUMMARY COMMENTS ON IMPLEMENTING BLUEPRINTS

Based on evaluation findings, three themes of change emerge when reform is initiated.

1. *Initiating and Maintaining Change*

Three critical precursors for initiating change are (1) conducting a needs assessment, (2) planning based on a comprehensive evaluation of all reform efforts, and (3) building a strong, supportive infrastructure. To the question on needs assessment, respondents indicated that they were done, but in at least half of the schools, the degree of thoroughness was an issue. Site-based teams were involved in the planning process that resulted in Reform Blueprints. A review of the Blueprints showed that the majority of schools had strong goals, objectives, and strategies to achieve their objectives. Only a few schools, however, had developed comprehensive plans to evaluate their reform efforts.

2. *Dominance of One Change Strategy*

More than half of the schools viewed the Success For All (SFA) reading program as the dominant change strategy, although most respondents felt that their focus was school-wide rather than on a particular subject. This misperception is driven in part by the structure of SFA program, which is designed to embed elements of change in all component areas except technology and integrated support services. Therefore, the belief is that change is occurring totally when in actuality SFA is only addressing parts of the components that support their curriculum. Another aspect of the misperception may result from the lack of alignment among the components at most of the schools. Even though the majority of respondents felt alignment existed among the various components, there were no clear descriptions of the linkages. Without total alignment, it is easy to believe something is fully integrated when indeed it is not.

3. *Obstacles to Change*

The obstacles cited by respondents fell into two categories: the predictable and less predictable. Psychosocial resistance is a predictable part of adjustment to change. It emanates from threatened security, competence, and status quo and manifests itself in denial, blame, stubbornness, and anger. Some respondents cited problems with top-level administrative decision-making not supporting the philosophies and activities of their reform programs. Some principals stated that the operations of the new academic and social programs would be more successful if all staff were full partners and supportive team players in the change process. Lack of tangible resources is a less predictable obstacle to implementing change. All schools reported that lack of funding and poor coordination of existing resources were obstacles to effective implementation of reform programs. Other obstacles cited were the absence of planning in professional/staff development, ineffective use of technology, and lack of parental support. Schools that appeared to circumvent most obstacles had built upon existing programs or created new partnerships within their communities.

COMMENDATIONS

The eight schools involved in our Network evaluation of the year I Blueprint implementation are commended for their willingness to assess and reform operations. Without the enthusiastic support and innovative leadership of these principals, data collection and analysis would not have been possible. They gave of their time to be interviewed, to complete the survey, and to gather documents. Following their example, teachers, staff, and parents completed surveys and discussed their experiences with evaluators. Our Network staff thanks the schools members and parents for their risk-taking behavior. We continue to refine this on-going evaluation process so that it will be a rich source of data to guide significant positive change that benefits students and the whole school community.

INTRODUCTION OF THE BELL SCHOOL REFORM NETWORK

The Terrel H. Bell School Reform Network (BSRN) is a private, non-profit, educational research and development organization. In 1997 the Bell Network piloted its Comprehensive School Reform Project with a one-day introductory workshop in Connecticut, California and Maryland. In Connecticut, 22 superintendents and 10 principals participated in the Project, which was co-sponsored by two regional technical assistance centers—CREC and LEARN. The curriculum of these workshops is framed by *RECLAIMING OUR NATION AT RISK—Lessons Learned: Reforming our Public Schools*. This nationally-acclaimed study was authored by Terrel H. Bell, former United States Secretary of Education, Dr. Kent Lloyd, Deputy Under Secretary to Bell, and Dr. Diane Ramsey, chair of the Bell Network. The study reports nationally-recognized, research-based school reform models and best practices, and has been recommended by American Association of School Administrators (AASA), National Education Association (NEA), National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA), and the California School Board Association (CSBA), largest in the country.

In 1998 the Network expanded its Project to a series of 10 all-day workshops using a community engagement strategy for comprehensive school reform. Representative 12-member teams from each school learned about successful research-based reform models and best practices. Each team assessed its own school against high-performance schools, identified its strengths and weaknesses, and designed a three-year "Blueprint" for comprehensive reform. Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPPS), Commissioner of Education Sergi, and U.S. Senator Dodd acknowledged the Project's accomplishments. During 1999-2000 eight Title I elementary schools (Annie Fisher, R.E. Betances, Sanchez, Winthrop, Chamberlain, Metacomet, Oliver Ellsworth, and Greeneville) from six districts implemented year one of their Blueprint. The following assessment of implementation year one explains the lessons learned.

Comprehensive school reform encompasses a cluster of major activities common to high-performing elementary schools, in contrast with fragmented education programs or activities. Eight essential components frame the curriculum for the 10-day series of design workshops and lead to increased student performance:

1. School-site governance by principal and management council;
2. Challenging academic standards in reading, math, and writing;
3. Student assessment and adult accountability;
4. School-wide character education;
5. Site-based professional development;
6. Integrated school support services;
7. Instructional technology support; and
8. Parent and community engagement.

Workshop attendees conduct a needs assessment and then discuss the eight components relative to successful reform models and best practices with demonstrations. In addition to planning around these components, they learn to set a climate for change at their schools through team-building exercises. Supporting activities include understanding budgets and cost of services, defining priorities for support services, reviewing concepts of team leadership, and creating strategies and timetables for presenting the Blueprint to their school staff and constituents and then implementing the Blueprints.

The Bell Network (BSRN) prepares and assists schools for implementation of comprehensive school reform over a three-year period. BSRN works in tandem with such nationally-recognized reform programs as Success for All and Modern Red School House. However, the Network's model provides a more comprehensive framework and assists schools in implementing appropriate reform programs such that meet their individual needs.

METHODOLOGY

Focus and Model

The first-year evaluation of the Bell School Reform Network's Comprehensive School Reform Project focuses on the extent to which the eight elementary schools in the Network's Consortium I were able to implement their Blueprints during the 1999 – 2000 academic year. Each school's goals for implementation are defined in their Blueprints. Using a multiple-methods evaluation model (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Patton, 1990), convergence or triangulation of information is guided by the following questions.

What are the major themes with related emerging issues as the Network's schools attempted to implement the eight Bell components of comprehensive reform?

What other issues did the schools encounter implementing their Blueprints?

Next, detailed information on the sample, data sources, including surveys (school principals, teachers, staff, and parents) and interviews (school principals), and document analysis are presented.

Sample

Eight schools comprised Bell's first-year evaluation. Each school received Title I and/or CSRD monies. Besides selecting the Bell School Reform Network as a change platform, all the schools in this sample contracted with Success for All to revise their reading curriculum. The schools have different programs for mathematics. A table of each school's characteristics follows.

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F	School G	School H
District ERG classification[1]	I	I	D	I	H	F	I	I
Number of elementary schools in district[2]	28	13	5	28	10	4	28	6
Priority School District	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
School grade range	K-6	K-5	1-5	PK-6	PK-6	K-4	PK-6	K-5
Number of students as of fall 1998	434	613	482	730	389	332	522	271
Percentage of special education students as of 1998	9.7%	16.2%	12.2%	12.2%	9%	13.6%	19.2%	22.5%
Percentage of students with non-English home language as of 1998	83.4%	61.5%	2.3%	4.3%	7%	.3%	93.3%	6.6%
Percentage of minority students as of 1998	99.3%	75.4%	49%	99.9%	34.4%	91.3%	99.8%	77.5%
Percentage of students who were here last year	73.7	70%	82.9%	77.1%	77.7%	79.8%	77.2%	77.8%
Mathematics program	Jostens & Harcourt Brace	Addison Wesley	Trail Blazers	Jostens	Everyday Math	Saxon	Jostens & Harcourt Brace	Saxon

1. See Appendices for description of ERGs.
2. Elementary school were defined as having any portion of grades 1-6. In some districts grade 6 was housed alone or in combination with middle school grades.

Information

In the following table, information sources and their applications are described (see surveys appended to this report).

Type of Information	Developer	Target Parties	Applications	Additional Comments
Interview Question Protocol	BSRN	School Principals (N=8)	To identify strengths and weaknesses of BSRN operations by corroborating other data with written survey questions.	Six questions guided 30-60 minute interviews conducted by Ramsey and Harris-Burke at school sites.
Written Survey	Northwest Educational Laboratory (NWEL)	School principals, teachers, site-based management team members, parents associated with school groups (Total N=149)	To identify the extent to which the eight Bell components been implemented; and the issues that the schools encountered implementing their Blueprints .	BSRN Revision of Questions: 90% were left in their original form. Three questions were added on character education and technology. There were 35 questions ranked on a 3-point scale: #1="like", #2="somewhat like", or #3="not like" my school. Administration: Surveys were administered at school sites by BSRN team and principals, March 2000.
Success for All Evaluations	Success for All: Slavin and Madden	All eight BSRN schools.	To corroborate this info with BSRN written survey questions regarding academic standards and assessment, character education, tutor services, and parent involvement.	Evaluations were conducted February 2000.
School Brochures and Newsletters	BSRN Schools	Parents & community members.	To corroborate this info with BSRN written survey questions regarding academic standards and assessment, character education, tutor services, and parent involvement.	Reviewed but not recorded.
School Blueprints	BSRN Schools	School members, parents & community members.	Reviewed for implementation strategies and evaluation plans.	Developed by schools during BSRN 10-day Design Workshop series held from Fall 1998 to Spring 1999.
School Profile Information	BSRN	All eight BSRN schools.	To corroborate info with BSRN written survey and interview questions regarding issures encountered during implementation.	Majority of the information was drawn from the CSDE School Directory and Strategic School Profiles.
Connecticut Mastery Test	CSDE with Harcourt-Brace	All eight BSRN schools.	To form baseline data for the next two years.	The data are intended for use in evaluation of reform efforts for the next two years.

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Analyses of Information

Primary supporting evidence for the evaluation consisted of school survey rankings, survey respondents' comments, principal interviews, and the February/March SFA evaluation reports. Supplemental evidence included special Blueprint progress reports, special school evaluation reports and literature.

In the finding's section of this report, tables are displayed by survey item and the percentages of respondents at each school who agreed that an item was "like" their school. For example, if school X had 25 people who completed their survey and 75% of respondents agreed that the survey items was "like" the condition at their school, then in a table for the item the number 75 would be entered for school X.[8]

The narratives that follow each table explain the topic or condition being described and summarize the issues emerging from the evaluative information. The quotes are edited comments from surveys and interviews.

FINDINGS

Major Themes with Related Emerging Issues in Implementing the Eight Components of Comprehensive Reform

1. School-site Management

Table 1.

Relevant Survey Questions:	School A (N=24)	School B (N=12)	School C (N=22)	School D (N=20)	School E (N=22)	School F (N=13)	School G (N=12)	School H (N=24)
The school staff and administrators focus on improved teaching and learning.	83	75	82	95	96	85	100	79
Innovative strategies are utilized in school management.	48	36	63	60	48	25	80	25
Parents and other school community members are active participants in the design and implementation of school improvement activities.	42	17	64	60	55	54	92	38

The site-based management team at each school is invested with the authority to implement the school's Blueprint and to manage change. The team—chaired by the principal and consisting of teachers, parents and community members—is involved in the review and evaluation of change activities and in decision making around improving the activities. Typically, the team engages in student assessment, curriculum and program review, and resource management. The SFA curriculum requires another layer of site management: a teacher facilitator who organizes and assists teachers with the curriculum and a family support team of parents, administrators, the teacher facilitator, and others. The purpose of this team is to increase family involvement and to help families address problems at home that affect student learning. In this section, three themes of site-based management were assessed: unified focus, innovative management strategies, and engagement of parents and community.

Unified focus. Over 75% of the respondents agreed that their school staff and administrators focus on improved teaching and learning. The majority of these respondents cited professional development as the focal point for improving teaching and learning. In particular, they felt improvements in teaching and learning were embedded in such professional development as BEST teachers' training and training in SFA. One school group believed that SFA provided a common language which helped unify the focus on teaching and learning.

The [SFA] program embeds a common language whereas before the teachers had the freedom of using a variety of terms and not necessarily understanding one another. Now it is more uniform with a common language throughout the school.

Innovative management strategies. There was a low level of agreement on innovative management strategies. Some respondents felt school management is quality oriented but dominated by district directives. Others mentioned that they were not really aware of innovative strategies. Yet, a minority of respondents mentioned the SFA approach as being unique. The SFA reports for all schools highly praised the facilitators and principals for their commitment to the program by spending time daily in the classrooms, providing training for teachers, and engaging parents and the community in learning activities.

Engagement of parents and community. Another low level of agreement was on the involvement of parents and community members in site-based management. Respondents' comments suggested that parents and community members were actively involved in decision making; however, they only represent a small portion of parents and the community. Since site-base management is new at the majority of the schools, it is possible that the respondents are misinterpreting quantity with reasonable representation. That is, one would expect a PTO to have many parents involved, whereas a decision-making commitment should only contain a well-represented but small number of people to be able to conduct business in a timely manner.

2. Challenging Academic Standards in Reading , Mathematics, and Writing

Table 2.

Relevant Survey Questions:	School A (N=24)	School B (N=12)	School C (N=22)	School D (N=20)	School E (N=22)	School F (N=13)	School G (N=12)	School H (N=24)
The school's program is based on best-practice research.	63	100	77	100	91	92	100	82
Instruction is guided by learning and performance standards.	70	73	82	95	86	69	91	59
Innovative strategies are utilized in student learning and teaching.	63	75	91	85	91	77	92	48
The school uses strategies, materials, and instructional methods for all students.	74	75	84	100	86	85	100	74

Effective curriculum and instruction flow from best-practice research and are guided by standards that address both learning and performance. Learning standards state what a student should learn while performance standards specify achievement levels for attaining the standards. The standards should embody disciplines beyond reading, writing, and mathematics. Instruction must include innovative teaching and learning strategies for a broad range of student abilities.

Research based. The majority of schools' respondents felt their instructional programs were researched based. The one school, which differed with the majority of schools, felt they had no decision in choosing the SFA program.

SFA has made a positive impact with a hundred percent of the students, maybe 75 or 80% of the parents and 50% of the staff. The students love it. I like to see them when they are in their teams, working, thinking, sharing, and helping each other. The teachers have to learn new things. Because now you cannot just open up that manual and hold it in you hand and read all those questions to the kids. You really have to work and you have to be prepared.

Guided by standards. When asked about learning and performance standards, half the schools were in high agreement that their instruction was guided by standards. These schools cited the CMT objectives and the *Connecticut Curriculum Frameworks* as major sources for curriculum and instruction, with SFA and selected math programs as supporting sources. The schools in lower agreement about standards acknowledged SFA and their new math programs as providing current standards while the rest were being developed.

SFA shifts the focus from the teacher to the student. The reading standards are closely aligned with the CT frameworks.

From the very beginning parents have said that SFA has been a new energy. It has had enormous impact on our climate that we build on the optimism the program brings. Some of the growth we see in our students is extraordinary. We have reduced the numbers of kids in lower reading levels and

increased the numbers in the upper levels. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students' vocabulary has increased and very much evident is that students are speaking in complete sentences.

Innovative strategies. As for innovative strategies in teaching and learning for all students, the majority of schools felt strategies were present and being employed. Two schools did state that the strategies for special education student could improve.

SFA and Trail Blazers math provide innovative strategies in learning and teaching. Other strategies include Reading Recovery and the use of tutors.

Actually I think the SFA program is wonderful. Everyone receives the same training. So that when an administrator moves from classroom to classroom they know what each classroom should be doing. Each teacher has the opportunity to present in his/her own unique or creative way. Students are being taught not only how to work cooperatively but how to ask higher-order questions.

The main focus of the school is reading and the staff, students, and parents are taking it seriously. SFA is an organized and sequential program. Just having the 90 minute time block, everyone knows its reading time. With the younger children, they are loving it and they are proud to share their books with their parents. I think the parents are more serious about listening to the kids read because it is part of the program.

3. Student Assessment and Adult Accountability

Table 3.

Relevant survey questions:	School A (N=24)	School B (N=12)	School C (N=22)	School D (N=20)	School E (N=22)	School F (N=13)	School G (N=12)	School H (N=24)
The school's goals for student performance match with state and/or district standards and assessments.	83	58	100	95	100	100	100	79
The school program produces educationally significant gains in reading, mathematics, and other subjects for all students.	50	55	48	80	32	77	75	27
There are strategies for working with students who do not meet performance standards.	67	58	82	95	67	92	92	50
There is evidence that these strategies are effective in moving students from non- and partially-proficient to more advanced levels.	44	46	73	90	57	62	92	41

Student assessment originates with an expected set of performance standards. Student outcomes can be measured in a number of ways depending on the type of assessment. For example, CMT gains are measured by the percent of students reaching goal and the percentages of students moving toward goal. SFA measures the percentages of students reading at their grade level or beyond every eight weeks. The adult accountability portion of student assessment focuses on teaching and learning practices for advancing students toward achieving an expected set of performance standards.

School goals match. Generally, the schools highly agreed that student performance goals match state and district standards and assessments. Student performance standards are established by the CMT goal levels for reading, writing, and mathematics. Most of the schools felt SFA and their selected mathematics programs supported state and district student performance goals.

Significant gains. Schools were mixed on agreeing that their programs produced significant gains in reading, mathematics, and writing. One issue is that, in the majority of the schools, SFA and math programs were only implemented this year. Therefore the students in these programs will not have their CMT scores until fall 2000. Another issue is that although SFA is showing students' gains in reading, some teachers will not believe the significance of the gains until they have the students' CMT scores.

SFA assessments are good for regrouping students by ability but we're uncertain about the significance of gains. Assessments also take place with the new math program and by use of grades 3 and 5 CMTs.

With some grade levels we've made significant growth, others advanced then leveled. It is possible that the plateau is based on timing of assessments. We had a number of students who jumped grade levels..... For the most part children are being instructed on their levels to learn so they are less frustrated, engaged, and having success. Children are homogeneously grouped and start with a host of support if needed.

Students have improved their reading. We have seen many more kids moving up to higher levels each week. And, some kids are being exited out of tutoring. Recently we conducted the DRA and our results were well above the district's average.

Strategies for under-performing students. Again, schools were mixed on agreeing that they had effective strategies for improving student achievement. The comments suggested that there are many available strategies, such as before- and after-school programs, tutoring, and others, but some respondents stated the relative effectiveness of the programs is not known.

Some teachers say moving students toward desired goals is slow. Others say it's faster than expected. And, some teachers feel options addressing student weaknesses are limited by mandated programs, while other say they are seeing promising results.

We are looking at kids in a different way. We are looking at strengths first rather than the CMT role, these are the issues or problems that the kid has. We have the parent come in and ask: "What can we [the parent] do in the classroom?" We weren't really doing this before. We are now looking at the whole child. In addition, students get a booklet of their growth in reading. We share the growth information collectively with the superintendent to illustrate student gains in reading.

When we look at how some of the students are moving there is positive proof about what is happening. We did preliminary testing and formed our groups, we realized that there were some students who should be a grade level above in reading.

4. School-wide Character Education Program

Table 4.

Relevant Survey Questions:	School A (N=24)	School B (N=12)	School C (N=22)	School D (N=20)	School E (N=22)	School F (N=13)	School G (N=12)	School H (N=24)
Character education is emphasized school-wide.	54	67	86	60	24	77	73	83

Character education is a critical component in changing the school's learning environment. This component aims to develop attentive and responsible learners through teaching respect for self and others, understanding different opinions, listening to each other, and meeting commitments. The majority of schools had implemented character education programs prior to fall 1999. Some of the schools, however, used the SFA character education component to build on their existing programs, while a few schools dropped their original programs and adopted the SFA component.

A new program in character education was a contentious issue because the school was using the Responsive Classroom program for two years which they felt was effective and had become part of the school's operations for shaping student behavior.

We already had in place Second Steps. We have kept that program as we implemented the SFA character education components. We expanded our program that includes reward ribbons for trustworthiness or fairness.

The SFA Getting Along Together component actually started out more significant than we thought. It was a minor program but has a major impact. We have our counsel meetings every week and kids are saying we give greater attention to their opinions. We continued with our Kindness and Justice Challenge and came in 7th in the state for the number of kindness and justice acts.

The SFA Peace Path and other components have helped with discipline or just having common signals and words to use within the building. In addition, we do the breakfast of champions for students who show on time and the Sunshine Club for kids who have a habit of coming late. We have a reward at the end of the week. A couple of teachers meet with the students in the morning and they might have a cupcake or something. There is a model in place and the kids know that someone cares about them coming in on time.

5. Professional and Staff Development

Table 5.

Relevant Survey Questions:	School A (N=24)	School B (N=12)	School C (N=22)	School D (N=20)	School E (N=22)	School F (N=13)	School G (N=12)	School H (N=24)
The school bases its professional development plan on its academic strengths and weaknesses.	67	58	44	80	86	69	92	59
The professional development plan includes leadership training for our principal and administration.	86	60	63	85	74	69	100	53
The district supports our professional development efforts (time, money, incentives).	57	50	24	45	0	69	90	60
Professional development is targeted, inclusive, and builds on previous efforts.	39	46	32	80	70	62	92	47
Support staff is involved in all professional development activities.	35	33	43	85	86	67	100	25

Basis of school development plan. Professional/staff development maintains the effectiveness and vitality of the learning environment. School reform emphasizes that professional/ staff development activities center on the school's teaching and learning environment and target previous efforts. Less than 25% of the schools, however, agreed that their professional/ staff development plan was based on academic strengths and weaknesses and was built on previous efforts. The following quotes illustrate various issues relating to professional/ staff development.

Goals set for PD were put aside to accommodate district goals and activities. PD in some respects has become a turn-key event. That is, selected teachers/staff are sent to a workshop with the intention that they return to inform others of district expectations and their experiences.

I believe PD is better. We rely on the "Turn Key" method - - staff informing staff. One benefit of this method is that staff presentation skills are being improved.

PD occurs three times a year and biweekly for reading, math, and writing components. There is no planned program or what is offered is weak.

PD is aligned with school goals but is just beginning for support staff.

SFA and math components are featured in PD; however, at times the districtwide plan does not meet the needs of the school.

Support for PD. Most schools felt that incentives for professional development were minimal. Other problems were release time and little money for PD.

Leadership training. The leadership component appeared to be strongly supported by one school district but not given the same emphasis in the other districts.

6. Integrated School Support Services

Table 6.

Relevant Survey Questions:	School A (N=24)	School B (N=12)	School C (N=22)	School D (N=20)	School E (N=22)	School F (N=13)	School G (N=12)	School H (N=24)
The principal and staff agree on implementation efforts designed to improve student achievement.	79	73	86	80	91	69	100	67
The majority of the staff is willing to assess strengths and weaknesses and make necessary changes.	71	73	77	85	100	69	100	83

Integrated School Support Services is defined as the combination of services used to address the needs of the students and families within the school. These services can include health, psychological, emotional, as well as transportation, nutrition and administrative. This component requires the school to assess its range of support services and integrate them whenever possible to maximize the available financial and human resources in order to improve student achievement.

Implementation efforts to improve achievement. Integrated school support services target school resources beyond teachers and parents. The resources include staff expertise, tutors, available community services for referrals, and business-school partnerships. The resources evaluated for this report targeted staff participation and tutoring. The majority of schools agreed that staff was involved in implementing school reform. All SFA reports cited strong tutoring teams within the schools.

We try to work as a team in all implementation efforts. There is unity and we constantly search for efforts to help students. Staff meetings and climate in the school clearly points to commitment to helping students.

Accomplishments and improvements are discussed at staff meetings. Staff supports such efforts as Saturday school and SFA. Self assessment has become a vital tool.

The total staff is integrated into school improvement by site team, committees, and meetings.

7. Technology Planning and Training

Table 7.

Relevant Survey Questions:	School A (N=24)	School B (N=12)	School C (N=22)	School D (N=20)	School E (N=22)	School F (N=13)	School G (N=12)	School H (N=24)
The school is implementing a technology plan.	36	18	64	83	82	39	33	58
School staff is receiving staff development in technology.	36	40	43	56	82	46	25	56

Technology is defined as the use of low and high forms of equipment to support the teaching and learning process. The technology reform component provides the "how to". It addresses the importance of choosing the right form of technology to enhance the lesson and vary the teaching techniques. With rapid changes in technology, it is very difficult for the educators to maintain a proactive stance on the most helpful equipment. However, it is important for the staff to know how to do the following: identify appropriate technology for teaching and learning at all levels; develop and test new instructional applications of technologies, and provide training to increase competence and knowledge in the use of instructional technologies.

Technology is the most misinterpreted of all reform components because of the lack of understanding or agreement on what is meant by technology. Most likely the scores given to technology planning and development reflect the extent of use and training regarding computers. At this writing, besides computers in the schools, there is no mention of using other technologies, such as VCRs for videos or homework hotlines.

As for technology, we are beginning to use the Jostens math program in grades 3 and 5 (this is assessment and teaching software). The concept is good ,but we need upgraded hardware to accommodate the programs. We created internet access on the library computers for all grades to use.

Unfortunately our building has not been wired…..supposedly it will this summer, but that depends on grant money.

There is an existing tech plan and all classrooms have computers. Training is available but not mandatory.

There is a district-wide plan, but it is difficult to implement it right now. There are computer courses available, but they are not mandatory.

8. Parent and Community Engagement

Table 8.

Relevant Survey Questions:	School A (N=24)	School B (N=12)	School C (N=22)	School D (N=20)	School E (N=22)	School F (N=13)	School G (N=12)	School H (N=24)
Parents are involved in decision-making at the school and serve on the school improvement committee.	75	17	73	70	86	54	100	42
Parents are provided with easily understood information about standards and expectations for student achievement.	61	42	68	70	77	62	83	54
Parents provide support for at-home learning opportunities.	21	33	48	45	36	15	50	30

Parent involvement is not an exclusive reform component in that it spans across many other components (e.g., governance, integrative services, etc.). For this evaluation, parent involvement perspectives were addressed by decision-making participation, communication, and support for learning. The majority of schools viewed parents as being involved in decision-making committees. Only about half of the schools, however, reported that parents were being provided with information that they understand. None of the schools strongly agreed that parents were providing support for at-home learning activities.

More parents are becoming involved but still not enough. Strategies for informing and engaging parents include letters, brochures, weekly phone calls, parent-teacher conferences, and workshops. Many reports and brochures explaining technical information are sent home. It is unclear whether the technical information is understood. The different languages present a barrier, and some of the written communication is presented in Spanish. The at-home learning component is weak.

We are looking at kids in different and positive ways. This helps the parent, because it is not putting the kids down. We may come up with more than one issue, but lets pick one goal, and we will meet again. Then we'll evaluate the child's behavior when he has to follow classroom instruction. So we talk about the child's behavior in the classroom. It is something simple. But the problem is, we have so many new parents. … We try to feature kids at every PTO meeting via student projects, academic achievement, and citizenship. But many parents don't make the meetings. So we offer incentives such as prizes to encourage more parents to attend.

An evaluation on Family Services was conducted by Dr. XX, University of Hartford, in August 1999. The evaluation assessed the 12 month Family Resource Center that includes SFA activities, University of Hartford assistance, and other special activities, such as summer programs for parents and their children. Regulars total 107 adults and children. Results showed that the following programs were successful: summer program for children, family math night, aerobics for adults, and new parenting skills. Selected recommendations included developing a plan to recruit and retain participating families, continue successful programs, and explore ways in which collaboration may be developed with early childhood education center initiative.

We have had parent workshops at [school name] for years. You send the letters out, and you invite them to come in. You and the four parents that show up have a good time. . But since we started SFA and the parent workshops, there has been expanded interest as shown by the numbers of attending parents. It started with a big spread in the newspaper about the [school name] plan is adopted. So a lot of people have read about that. Then when we sent notices home about the new reading program and whatever. They were curious. And then the kids were coming home talking about their experiences. For example, I was in the beauty parlor and one parent came in, "Oh my child came home and he was so excited. He said you know that teacher is so smart, and she did this…" She continued on and was just wild about what she was hearing from her kid.

Other Themes and Issues

9. Implementing and Using the Blueprint

Table 9.

Relevant Survey Questions:	School A (N=24)	School B (N=12)	School C (N=22)	School D (N=20)	School E (N=22)	School F (N=13)	School G (N=12)	School H (N=24)
School improvement is an agreed upon focus at the school.	71	58	96	90	100	69	100	91
The school-site management council conducted a thorough needs assessment.	57	33	73	74	86	27	73	37
Improvement efforts encompass the whole school rather than focus on particular grade levels, subjects, students or teachers.	83	67	86	100	64	77	100	68
There is alignment among curriculum, standards, assessments, teaching, character education and professional development.	65	75	73	75	73	46	83	46
The school has a process to evaluate the effectiveness of school improvement efforts.	63	42	71	90	82	92	75	59
The school adjusts its practices based on evaluation results.	75	58	81	90	73	67	92	55
The school links its evaluation efforts to state/local standards.	67	50	76	90	77	85	83	70

Implementing a Blueprint of change involves an agreed-upon focus for the eight components: school-site governance by principal and management council; challenging academic standards in reading, math, and writing; student assessment and adult accountability; school-wide character education; site-based professional development; integrated school support services; instructional technology support; and parent and community engagement.

It is preceded by a thorough needs assessment. Improvement efforts encompass the entire school and require aligning those efforts by standards, curriculum and instruction, and professional development, and an on-going evaluation of all efforts to improve the school.

The majority of the schools had high agreement about school improvement. Schools with lesser agreement on improvement stated that the SFA program had dominated the reform focus. Only about half the schools felt that a thorough needs assessment had been conducted.

Needs' surveys were filled out by teachers, parents, and students. There are weekly site-base council meetings and the efforts to constantly improve. The family support team is engaged in addressing school-wide issues. However, some of the specialists hired are not familiar enough with the reform efforts.

A thorough needs assessment had not been conducted but teachers are involved in reform efforts through PD.

School-wide improvement has been guided by SFA. Views on learning are driven by standards based on SFA, numeracy and literacy, and CMT scores.

The majority of the teachers and staff support the reform plan activities and are willing to serve on the improvement team. The agreed upon focus is supported by PD.

Schools had mixed responses about improvement efforts encompassing the entire school and aligning those efforts by standards, curriculum and instruction, and professional development.

The new improvements have brought organization and unity among curriculum, standards, assessments, teaching, character education and professional development, but other teachers view the improvements as disjointed efforts and competing with each other in terms of time.

School-wide improvement has been guided by SFA and components are aligned with that curriculum.

A district consultant is assigned to align these models with learning and performance standards.

Templates have been constructed to align the curriculum with standards, etc.

Many respondents discussed evaluation activities that pertained to SFA assessments and CMT score assessments exclusively. Also, some mentioned that their districts had established leadership academies where the training focuses on data collection and analysis.

Evaluation of progress beyond standard academic assessments and scores include surveys to parents.

Presently, evaluations relate to SFA, CMT results, and monthly writing prompts.

Effectiveness information generally targets SFA assessments and CMT scores.

Assessment and test results are used to evaluate reform efforts.

10. Technical and Financial Resources

Table 10.

Relevant Survey Questions:	School A (N=24)	School B (N=12)	School C (N=22)	School D (N=20)	School E (N=22)	School F (N=13)	School G (N=12)	School H (N=24)
Technical assistance to the school is clearly linked to the school program's priority needs.	52	46	55	55	18	75	75	35
Technical support is linked to state/ local standards.	57	46	40	68	18	85	67	41
Federal/ state/ local/ private resources are coordinated to maximize the scope of the school's program.	43	46	68	56	35	73	33	55
The district provides support in leveraging existing resources.	29	25	46	47	5	50	8	44

School reform is maintained and sustained by human and financial support, such as technical assistance, facilities, and funding. For technical assistance, the majority of schools felt that it was not linked to program needs or to state and local standards. In particular, respondents expressed the need for more professional development and tutors. Respondents, however, did cite SFA as providing much assistance with the reading curriculum. For facilities and funding, the majority of schools felt that resource coordination needed improvement, and districts could do better leveraging existing resources. Some schools did cite Bell Network (BSRN) and other organizations as actively involved in helping them obtain

funding, and that Title 1 grants supported the majority of reform efforts. The school that had the highest agreement on their district providing supportive resources mentioned their grant writer and the use of central office facilities for weekend student programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SCHOOLS ON IMPLEMENTING THE EIGHT COMPONENTS

Table 11. Strengths and Suggested Areas of Improvement.

School	Areas
School A	Strengths: Integrated Support Services Recommendations: Complete standards for student learning and performance in all disciplines. Develop strategies for working with low performing students. Where possible re-establish portions of the Responsive Classroom. Establish a PD plan just for the school. Identify and implement learning strategies that use various technologies. Build on strategies for informing and engaging parents.
School B	Strengths: Academic Standards, Integrated Support Services Recommendations: Develop strategies for working with low performing students. Where possible re-establish portions of the Character Counts. Establish a PD plan just for the school. Identify and implement learning strategies that use various technologies. Build on strategies for informing and engaging parents and try to print materials in other languages in addition to English and Spanish.
School C	Strengths: Academic Standards, Student Assessment, Character Education, Integrated Support Services, Parent and Community Engagement Recommendations: Develop strategies for greater inclusion of special education students. Establish a PD plan just for the school and build on previous efforts. Identify and implement learning strategies that use various technologies and allow for training time in use of the technologies. Develop strategies for improving at-home learning.
School D	Strengths: Academic Standards, Student Assessment, Professional Development, Integrated Support Services, Parent and Community Engagement Recommendations: Build on the Character Education curriculum. Keep adding various technologies in the curriculum. Develop strategies for improving at-home learning.
School E	Strengths: Academic Standards, Profession Development, Integrated Support Services, Technology, Parent and Community Engagement Recommendations: Develop strategies for working with low performing students. Develop character education beyond SFA components. Develop strategies for improving at-home learning.
School F	Strengths: Academic Standards, Student Assessment, Character Education Recommendations: Establish a PD plan just for the school that builds on previous efforts. Increase staff willingness in making school improvements. Develop a technology plan and identify learning strategies that use various technologies. Build on strategies for informing and engaging parents.
School G	Strengths: Academic Standards, Student Assessment, Staff Development, Parent and Community Engagement Recommendations: Strengthen character education. Garner financial resources to hire tutors and establish a volunteer tutor center. Identify and implement learning strategies that use various technologies. Develop strategies for improving at-home learning.
School H	Strengths: Character Education, Integrated Support Services Recommendations: Develop standards for student learning and performance in all disciplines. Develop strategies for working with low performing students. Establish a PD plan just for the school that builds on previous efforts. Incrementally implement the new technology plan. Build on strategies for informing and engaging parents.

SUMMARY COMMENTS ON IMPLEMENTING BLUEPRINTS

The Bell School Reform Network targeted eight major components of comprehensive school reform. The eight components were identified as the essential ingredients of changing schools from centers of teaching to centers of learning. The literature is rich in organizational transformation and school change models but no one model could encompass everything that was found in this evaluation.

Summaries of the evaluation findings are grouped by three prevailing themes.

- Initiating and Maintaining Change
- Dominance of One Change Strategy
- Obstacles to Change

Initiating and Maintaining Change

The Bell School Reform Network 10-day program provided the platform for principals and their representative teams to discuss implementing change. During their interviews, many principals explained how they set the climate for change at their schools in staff meetings and discussions with parents. Two critical precursors for communicating change are (1) needs assessments and planning and (2) a strong infrastructure for change momentum built upon a comprehensive evaluation of all reform efforts. Responses to the question about conducting needs assessment indicated that assessments were done but the degree of thoroughness was an issue in at least half of the schools. The planning process at the schools involved the site-based teams, and the resulting documents were Blueprints. A review of the Blueprints revealed that the majority of schools had strong goals, objectives, and strategies to achieve their objectives. However, only a few schools included comprehensive plans to evaluate their reform efforts. When respondents were asked about evaluating their efforts, the overwhelming majority cited using student achievement from SFA assessments and CMT scores, and some included using full SFA reports.

Dominance of One Change Strategy

More than half of the schools viewed the Success for All (SFA) reading as the dominant change strategy, although most respondents felt that their focus was school-wide rather than on a particular subject. Part of this misperception is driven by the structure of SFA. The SFA program is designed to embed elements of change in all component areas except technology and integrated support services. Therefore, the belief is that change is occurring totally when in actuality SFA is only addressing parts of the components that support their curriculum. Another aspect of the misperception may result from the lack of alignment among the components at most of the schools. Even though the majority of respondents felt alignment existed among the various components, there were no clear descriptions of how the linkages were established. Without total alignment, it is easy to believe something is fully integrated when indeed it is not.

Obstacles to Change

No change process is void of obstacles because change affects thought, work, operations, and tangible resources. The obstacles cited by school respondents fell into two categories: the predictable and the not so predictable. Psychosocial resistance is a predictable part of adjustment to change and emanates from threatened security, competence, and/or status quo. Manifestations of this type of resistance are denial, blame, stubbornness, and anger. David L. Stein sums up the thought process about change as, "The past is gone; the present is full of confusion; and the future scares the __ out of me!" Some respondents cited problems with top-level administrative decision-making not supporting the philosophies and activities of their reform programs. Some principals stated that the operations of the new academic and social programs would be more successful if all staff were full partners and team players in the change process. Lack of tangible resources is a less predictable condition of implementing change. The lack of funding and/or the coordination and leveraging of existing resources to support the reform programs were cited as major problems by all schools. Other non-supporting conditions cited were the lack of planning in professional/staff development, use of technology, and lack of parental support. The schools that appeared to circumvent or avoid most obstacles had built on previously in-place programs or created new partnerships within their communities.

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ENDNOTES

a. The survey had three Likert ranking-points: "like my school," somewhat like my school," and "not like my school." The percentage distribution of responses among these points was based on actual responses. Therefore, someone not responding was treated as a missing case. An over 5% rule was used to further analyze a response set for spurious reporting. That is if over 5% of the total sample did not score an item, then the item's topic was evaluated with existing evidence as to whether or not the distribution of response percentages appeared to be appropriate.